

Chronotopic Consonance in *Garm Hawa* (1974) and *Mammo* (1994)

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Abstract

M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Shyam Benegal's *Mammo* (1994) are two germane works in Indian cinema, each offering poignant reflections on the trauma and dislocation following the Partition of India in 1947. Through the lens of their protagonists, both films examine the existential and socio-political struggles faced by individuals caught in the India-Pakistan divide. While *Garm Hawa* portrays the challenges of a Muslim family's survival and belonging in post-Partition India, *Mammo* focuses on an elderly woman's experience of exile and her struggle for identity against an unyielding bureaucracy. This study explores the chronotopic intersections between *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo*, separated by 20 years in their release, by examining how each film confronts issues of identity, statelessness, and marginalisation. By applying critical perspectives from scholars such as Ashis Nandy, Bhaskar Sarkar, Homi Bhabha and Ira Bhaskar (among others), this analysis situates both films within the larger discourse of Partition studies and postcolonial trauma, and try to demonstrate how both Sathyu and Benegal navigate the complex terrain of national identity and individual resilience. The analysis concludes by considering the enduring relevance of these films in contemporary contexts, marked by issues of migration, displacement, and nationalism.

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1. Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 was not only a geopolitical event but also a human catastrophe that deeply scarred the subcontinent, leading to unprecedented displacement, loss, and trauma. For millions, this marked a painful rupture, transforming their identities, homes, and futures. The ripples of this historical event continue to appear in Indian cinema, especially in films that confront the Partition and its aftermath. M.S. Sathyu's *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Shyam Benegal's *Mammo* (1994) stand out as milestones, navigating through the themes of exile, identity, and survival in the post-Partition landscape. *Garm Hawa* presents the cumulative struggle of a Muslim family in post-Partition India, grappling with socio-economic marginalization and identity crises in their ancestral land. In contrast, *Mammo*, through the character of an elderly Muslim woman exiled from Pakistan, underscores the emotional and existential dislocation caused by bureaucratic and political apathy. While both films differ in narrative focus and audio-visual texture, they intersect in their portrayal of the fragmented identities and societal exclusion experienced by Muslims in the wake of the Partition.

This paper aims to provide a nuanced exploration of how these films address the implications of the Partition using a critical lens that draws from political, cinematic, and postcolonial theories. Bhaskar Sarkar and Jyotika Virdi argue that Indian Partition cinema acts as both a repertoire and a critique of cultural memory, making these films essential to understanding collective trauma and nostalgia in South Asian communities (Sarkar; 2009, Virdi; 2003). By examining the sinuous motifs, narrative structures, and the mesh of characters in *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo*, this study aims to anatomise how each film elucidates and bespeaks the permanent ramifications of the Partition on individual and cumulative identities. Furthermore, the perspicacity of political theorists such as Partha Chatterjee and Homi Bhabha helps contextualise the films within broader discussions of nationalism, statelessness, and belonging.

2. Historical and Cultural Context of Partition in Indian Cinema

Partition cinema emerged as a subgenre in Indian filmmaking, evincing the collective trauma, displacement, and fractured

identities of those affected by the events of 1947. The historical context of these films is critical as they grapple with the formation of national identities in both India and Pakistan and the perpetual liminality faced by minorities, particularly Muslims, in newly independent India. Films such as *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* showcase not only the horrors of the Partition but also the enduring psychological scars left on subsequent generations. It left an indelible mark on the representation of Muslim identity in Indian cinema, often rendered as caught between the themes of allegiance and survival. *Garm Hawa*'s Salim Mirza embodies his community's struggle to find integration and dignity in India, a sentiment shared by Mammo in Benegal's film, as she attempts to mend fractured ties with her family in India, and the bureaucratic framework of her "homeland." These films reflect the internalised fear, alienation, and need for validation that Muslim communities experienced in India after the incident.

The Partition of India forced the country to confront questions of national identity, secularism, and inclusivity of the nation-state. Partha Chatterjee notes that postcolonial nation-states often exclude minority voices, who are considered peripheral to the dominant narratives of nationalism (Chatterjee; 1993). Films such as *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* illustrate this phenomenon, where the Muslim protagonists' exclusion is representative of a fractured national identity. Through their stories, Sathyu and Benegal critique the limitations of the Indian state in providing accoutre to all its citizens, challenging audiences to rethink belonging and inclusion.

Postcolonial theory provides a plausible framework for comprehending the diasporic displacement experienced by the pivotal characters in both films. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the "third space" help us to scan Mammo's liminality, as she exists in a state of exile that challenges unequivocal notions of identity and belonging. (Bhabha: 1994). Her liminal existence as a "stateless" figure becomes a synecdoche for displaced communities everywhere, resonating with postcolonial spectators who navigate similar spaces of in-betweenness. Cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, who deem cultural identity as fluid and constructed, offer perspectives that resonate with Sathyu and Benegal's portrayal of Muslim identities caught between India and Pakistan yet unable to fully belong in either.

As mentioned above, Indian cinema serves as a repertoire and conduit for cultural memory, enabling audiences to engage with traumatic historical events. In line with this understanding, Bhaskar Sarkar argues that films dealing with the Partition function as sites of memory where personal and collective losses are mourned, creating a shared national identity despite divisions (Sarkar; 2009). Similarly, Ashis Nandy highlights how Partition cinema offers narratives of resilience amid oppression and violence, which are essential for cultural healing (Nandy; 1983). In *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo*, the protagonists' personal stories echo larger collective memories, reinforcing cinema's role in preserving the trauma of the Partition for future generations.

3. The Chronotopic Overlaps in *Mammo* and *Garm Hawa*

Set in the early 1950s, *Garm Hawa* depicts a critical period when Muslim communities in India faced increasing marginalisation and economic struggles. M.S. Sathyu's film portrays the socio-political exclusion of Muslims through Salim Mirza's encounters with landlords, government officials, and society at large, who regard him and his family

with suspicion and distrust. In contrast, *Mammo*, set in the 1990s, reflects a different, yet enduring, form of marginalisation. By focusing on Mammo's experiences with India's bureaucratic system, Benegal critiques the complex and often dehumanising processes that alienate individuals with tenuous citizenship or stateless status. Mammo's struggle to secure a place in India, despite her familial ties, reveals the persistence of exclusionary practices that echo the historical divisions brought about by Partition.

A key difference between the two films is the role of gender in shaping the protagonists' experiences. *Garm Hawa* presents the patriarchal figure of Salim Mirza as the central protagonist, whose decisions directly affect his family's fate. His role as the head of the family highlights the pressures and responsibilities that come with being a Muslim man in a precarious sociopolitical climate. His daughters face social constraints, with his eldest daughter Amina's romantic relationship becoming a symbol of broken dreams and hopeless futures in a fractured society. Amina's tragic fate resonates as a critique of both culturally specific patriarchy and the singular burdens placed on women during periods of political turmoil.

In contrast, *Mammo* presents an elderly woman as its protagonist, whose marginalisation is compounded by her gender. Mammo, a single, childless woman, occupies a liminal social space, and her vulnerability is amplified by her lack of legal standing in India. Shyam Benegal uses her status to underscore the additional challenges that women face in claiming agency and belonging in hostile environments. Mammo's determination to remain with her family, despite bureaucratic obstacles, contrasts with Salim Mirza's passive resistance to societal pressures. This gendered perspective adds a significant dimension to the narrative, showing how women, particularly older or childless women, are disproportionately affected by sociopolitical upheavals. Anjali Gera Roy highlights that in Partition cinema, the female body often symbolizes both vulnerability and resilience, a duality evident in Mammo's character as she navigates spaces of exile with courage and defiance. (Roy; 2008)

Another significant symbol in *Mammo* is the recurring imagery of the locked gates and barriers. For instance, Mammo's constant attempts to leave the family home to meet acquaintances or visit familiar places are often punctuated by physical chicken-necks. These spaces, often subtly filmed through close-up shots, underscore her limited freedom and symbolise the societal and legal constraints preventing her from reuniting with her homeland. Mammo's life, in essence, becomes a series of borders she cannot cross; an experience that resonates with Partition survivors who found themselves on the wrong side of arbitrary lines. The most poignant symbol in *Mammo* is the eponymous character's Pakistani passport, which paradoxically serves as both her identity and an instrument of her exclusion. The passport embodies her statelessness, as it links her to a country she cannot wholly embrace and distances her from her longed-for home she longs for in India. This document, meant to signify identity and statehood, becomes a symbol of her alienation.

4. Visual and Sonic landscapes in the films

Both *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* employ distinct visual registers to evoke the emotional landscapes of their protagonists. *Garm Hawa*'s use of stark realism, with its subdued colour palette and minimalistic cinematography, mirrors the grim socio-political reality of its time. Sathyu employs wide shots and sparse mise-en-scène to convey the

isolation and alienation of Salim Mirza's family, often positioning them against vast, empty backgrounds that symbolise their vulnerability and their displacement. These aesthetic choices emphasise the loss of home and belonging, resonating with the harsh and unforgiving atmosphere of post-Partition India. In contrast, *Mammo*'s visual approach is more intimate, relying on close-ups, natural lighting, and carefully framed interiors to highlight the warmth of familial bonds amidst societal exclusion. Benegal's use of lighting, particularly warm tones in scenes of reminiscence, reflects Mammo's nostalgia for a lost homeland and emphasises the personal and emotional impact of her exile. The focus on intimate spaces, such as Riyaz's home, contrasts with the vast, empty settings in *Garm Hawa*, creating a sense of warmth and connection that is repeatedly threatened by the looming spectre of deportation. This contrast in visual style reflects the different narrative approaches: while *Garm Hawa* evokes collective loss and desolation, *Mammo* portrays the quieter, internalised trauma of displacement and nostalgia.

Additionally, Benegal creates the sonic landscape of his film in a very calculated way. The film often lingers on quiet moments, allowing silence to speak of Mammo's solitude and isolation. The soundscape in these scenes, such as the quiet rustle of leaves or distant city noises, evokes the ambience of an empty, alienated life in which memories replace real connections. This cinematic silence, punctuated by Mammo's occasional reminiscences or quiet interactions with Riyaz, allows the audience to immerse themselves in the depth of her experience, creating a powerful sense of empathy.

Both films critically explore the experience of Muslim identity in India, but from different perspectives. *Garm Hawa* addresses this theme through the challenges faced by Salim Mirza's family, who experience societal suspicion and discrimination based on their faith. The Mirza family's struggle for economic survival becomes a synecdoche for the precarious position of Indian Muslims, who must constantly prove their loyalty to a state that regards them with ambivalence or hostility. Salim's determination to stay in India, despite offers to emigrate to Pakistan, serves as a powerful assertion of his Indian identity, challenging the perception that religious identity dictates national belonging. However, his loyalty to India places him in a position where he is seen neither as fully Indian nor as an outsider but as someone whose belonging is contingent on societal acceptance. Bhabha's work on liminality, as cited above, can be used to elucidate this tension, showing how postcolonial subjects often occupy spaces where identity is fluid, unstable, and shaped by external pressures. By contrast, *Mammo* personalises the Muslim identity experience by focusing on one individual's struggle with statelessness. Mammo's status as a Pakistani citizen complicates her sense of identity, as she yearns to belong to India with her family but is prevented from doing so by legal and bureaucratic barriers. Her story thus critiques the limits of nationalism, questioning the logic of borders and citizenship when they serve to separate families and sever cultural ties.

Ashis Nandy's insights on identities created by Partition offer a pertinent lens here, as he notes that Partition displaced individuals not only physically but also psychologically, forcing them into fragmented identities. (Nandy; 1983) Through *Mammo*, Benegal critiques the exclusionary policies that prioritize national identity over kinship and humanity, positioning *Mammo*'s story as emblematic of the many Partition survivors who found themselves strangers in familiar lands.

5. The Use of Affective Techniques

One of the most striking elements shared by *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* is their ability to utilise affective techniques that draw viewers into the protagonists' experiences of estrangement and resilience. In *Garm Hawa*, dialogue scenes punctuated by the copious use of silence and pauses convey hopelessness and resignation, making Salim's eventual breakdown deeply moving. The tragic arc of Amina, whose life is destroyed by societal prejudice and the harsh realities of the Partition, adds emotional weight, leaving viewers with a haunting sense of loss.

Mammo, with its more intimate narrative, elicits empathy through Riyaz's relationship with his aunt. Benegal crafts scenes that emphasise the warmth and love between them, such as shared meals and conversations. These scenes of intimacy underscore the tragedy of Mammo's impending deportation, making her struggle not only a legal issue but also a profoundly personal one. The affective power of *Mammo* lies in its ability to translate bureaucratic indifference into human suffering, drawing viewers into the depths of Mammo's personal and cultural exile.

In both films, affective power extends beyond individual suffering to critique the sociopolitical structures that perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation. As Sarkar notes, films that engage with Partition trauma often serve as (Sarkar; Ibid) preserving the emotional memory of historical events for collective reflection. *Mammo* and *Garm Hawa* exemplify this function, offering audiences a way to engage with Partition not merely as history but as an ongoing cultural and psychological reality.

6. Cinematic and Political lenses

To understand *Mammo* and *Garm Hawa*, it is essential to engage with theoretical frameworks that reveal the depth of their critique of nationalism, identity, and the lingering trauma of the Partition. Both *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* adopt a form of cinematic realism that underscores the quotidian struggles of their protagonists while providing a broader socio-political critique. This 'realist' approach, often marked by the understated, everyday resilience of the characters, draws from Italian Neorealism's influence on Indian filmmakers, particularly in their portrayal of marginalised communities.

In *Garm Hawa*, Sathyu's use of realism, captured in stark landscapes, minimalist sets, and naturalistic acting, aligns with the Marxist film theory's emphasis on portraying material conditions. This theory, as articulated by thinkers such as Georg Lukács, suggests that realist narratives should reveal how external forces, such as economic structures and social hierarchies, shape individual lives (Lukács, 1977). Sathyu's portrayal of Salim Mirza's family which suffers both financially and socially, emphasizes – in keeping with this critical tradition – how nationalistic and religious divisions impoverish communities and exacerbate social inequalities.

While *Mammo* is also realist in its setting and character interactions, it adopts a more intimate route focused on memory, emotional resilience, and individual subjectivity. Benegal uses the narrative device of a child's perspective to evoke a subtler, more personal realism that emphasises how individual identities and familial bonds endure despite political upheavals. In line with social realism theories, Benegal's portrayal of Mammo's struggle against bureaucratic exclusion highlights how state structures fail to recognise individual histories and attachments. The film's close-up shots, intimate settings, and focus on familial relationships capture a type of realism that resonates

emotionally with audiences, drawing them into Mammo's world and emphasising her emotional resilience as a form of resistance.

The concept of nationalism, as explored in *Mammo* and *Garm Hawa*, can be examined through Benedict Anderson, who argues that a nation is an imagined construct built on a shared identity and collective memory upheld through symbols, traditions, and rituals. (Anderson; 1983) In *Garm Hawa*, Salim Mirza's determination to remain in India despite systemic discrimination reflects a complex loyalty to an "imagined" India, an India that should be home to Muslims as much as it is to Hindus. His reluctance to migrate to Pakistan signifies his resistance to the exclusivist notion of nationalism that would confine religious minorities to designated spaces. In contrast, *Mammo* critiques the bureaucratic mechanisms that reduce individuals to mere representations of their nationality, stripping them of their personal identity in favour of state-defined categories. Mammo's inability to stay with her family in India, despite her deep ties to the country, highlights the limitations and injustices of a bureaucratic system that enforces national belonging through rigid documentation. Anderson's insights into the arbitrariness of borders and the state's role in defining identity are critical here, as Mammo's narrative questions the validity of nationality when it divides rather than unites families: the film's critique of the legal and bureaucratic dimensions of nationalism reflects a broader philosophical debate about the exclusionary nature of nation-states, which prioritise political definitions over human connections.

7. Mammo and Salim Mirza as Diasporic Characters

Thinkers such as Stuart Hall have argued that diasporic identities are not fixed; they are constantly reshaped by experiences of migration, memory, and nostalgia. (Hall; 1990). Salim Mirza's character in *Garm Hawa* embodies this diasporic identity, even within his homeland. Although he chooses to stay in India, his identity as an Indian Muslim forces him into a diasporic state of mind as he navigates a society that increasingly views him as an outsider. His family's fragmented existence, marked by forced emigration and estrangement-as more and more individuals from his immediate and extended family decide in favour of moving to Pakistan with the rolling out of the narrative-reflects the condition of internal exile faced by many Muslims in post-Partition India. Bhaskar Sarkar's insights on cultural memory in Partition cinema reinforce this perspective, suggesting that films like *Garm Hawa* preserve diasporic memories as a form of resistance to erasure, keeping alive the histories and identities of marginalized communities.

Sarkar argues that the act of remembering through cinema is a form of resistance. Films such as *Garm Hawa* counter hegemonic narratives that often marginalise minority experiences, instead offering a platform for subaltern voices. The evocative use of dialogue, silence, and settings in *Garm Hawa* serves as a repository of cultural memory, preserving the affective dimensions of loss and resilience. Such films foster a collective consciousness among diasporic and marginalised communities, enabling them to resist cultural erasure and assert their identity in the face of historical amnesia. (Sarkar; 2009)

Mammo's memories of Lahore and her deep connection to her Indian family also produce a diasporic consciousness that transcends physical borders, allowing her to inhabit multiple cultural spaces and temporal locations at once, aligning with Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed state.

In addition, trauma theory provides a framework for analysing how the two films represent the psychological scars of the Partition. Cathy Caruth does not see trauma only as the experience of the event but also as its aftermath and the struggle to understand and integrate it into one's life (Caruth, 2016). For Mammo, her exile is a form of continued trauma, as she is continually denied acceptance in the country she views as her home. Her quiet resilience in the face of bureaucratic indifference represents the unhealed wounds of Partition survivors, who must constantly navigate a world in which borders dictate their identity.

Salim Mirza's family, in *Garm Hawa*, experiences a similar collective trauma, the film's emotional arc, punctuated by Amina's tragic fate, encapsulates the trauma of an entire community, struggling to rebuild their lives in a nation that increasingly views them with suspicion. Bhaskar Sarkar's concept of affective archives becomes relevant here, as both films serve as repositories of Partition's traumatic memory, capturing the emotional reality of marginalized communities. (Ibid) This affective dimension allows the films to go beyond historical documentation, presenting a layered and empathetic portrayal of those who endured the Partition's aftermath.

8. The significance of allusion to *Garm Hawa* in *Mammo*

The direct textual allusions to *Garm Hawa* in *Mammo* serve as cinematic intertextual markers that anchor the latter film's narrative of personal displacement and communal memory within a well-established post-Partition continuum. In referencing this earlier film, *Mammo* does not merely pay homage but strategically aligns itself with a lineage of critical, self-reflexive historiography that interrogates the lingering reverberations of the Partition's ruptures.

Such allusions highlight the endurance of cultural amnesia and contested citizenship, which historians such as Mushirul Hasan have identified as "protracted crises of belonging in a postcolonial nation-state" (Hasan, 1993). By evoking *Garm Hawa*, *Mammo* situates its protagonist's dilemmas-those of identity, legal recognition, and affective kinship-within a lineage of subaltern marginalities. M. Madhava Prasad, note that "Hindi cinema's grappling with Partition reveals a palimpsest of unresolved tensions, where personal narratives are inscribed upon the larger canvas of national trauma" (Prasad; 1998). Thus, *Mammo*'s allusions to *Garm Hawa* signify the re-inscription of historical consciousness into the filmic narrative, forging continuity between the past and present crises of identification.

These cinematic resonances also mirror the psychological complexities outlined by political thinker Ashis Nandy, who argues that the Partition's legacy persists through memory formations that re-emerge in everyday life (Nandy). *Mammo*'s deliberate invocation of *Garm Hawa*, through the act of the characters watching it, as well as the reference to PWA veteran Saadat Hasan 'Manto', ensures that the audience confronts historical dissonances, recognizing that the burdens of Partition's legacy remain deeply embedded in cultural consciousness.

In this manner, *Mammo* not only reaffirms *Garm Hawa*'s emblematic status but also recontextualises its narratives within the evolving frameworks of nation, memory, and cinematic historiography.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* remain defining works in Indian cinema. By presenting protagonists who confront the stark realities of displacement, statelessness, and sociopolitical exclusion, both films reveal the deep, lasting scars of the Partition on individuals and communities. These films question the foundations of nationalism, exposing its divisive impact on personal and familial identities, and reveal how individuals caught between borders navigate fluid and fractured identities, embodying the contradictions and complexities of post-Partition existence. Furthermore, characters such as Salim Mirza and Mammo serve as symbols of resilience, embodying the hope and defiance of those who resisted forced migration and exclusion. Through their stories, the two films offer audiences a means to engage with the Partition not just as a historical event but as a lived, ongoing trauma that continues to inform questions of identity, citizenship, and belonging. The legacy of *Garm Hawa* and *Mammo* extends beyond their respective times of release. In an era where issues of migration, statelessness, and national identity are increasingly prevalent worldwide, these films hold powerful relevance, urging viewers to question exclusionary practices and consider the human cost of bureaucratic indifference and rigid nationalism. Benegal and Satayu's films are therefore important contributions to Indian Partition cinema and global discussions on identity and displacement.

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